



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
Department of Genetics

29 August 1972

Dr. John Lambert  
School of English Studies  
Macquarie University  
New South Wales

Dear Dr. Lambert:

This is in response to your letter of August 16th, which was in response to my article in the S. C. Law Review.

If you are worried about hubris, you will have to refer that to the gods. For my own part, I can find a lot of fault with that article. I don't know whether you got a copy of an erratum which I thought to send along with a very few reprints. In any case, ~~two versions of this are~~ enclosed.

[ I am sorry to see that you are falling victim to the Australian syndrome, a partly real, but in part, imaginary sense of being cut off from the rest of the world. I doubt that you are missing very much. ]

I have to regret a number of things that were not made sufficiently clear: above all, the autonomy of value principles, which can in no way be derived from science or from tool logic. Monod may be making much out of little in talking about the ethic of knowledge, or authentic discourse, but there certainly is an important principle in the overt commitment to that autonomy. I understand what you say in referring to the "lack of center" and the "vortex leading to another dimension" that afflicts my writing. I do not have a constructed ethical system to offer at this time and the principle of autonomy is of course only a process step towards the evolution of a coherent system. [ But the paragraph that you quoted about unavoidable/impossible strikes me as being merely sloppy writing. ] We have to make some efforts at the redefinition of personal rights but I would not expect too much to come out of them.

As to your diagram, <sup>you and I</sup> are we really at odds about "do" vs. "know"? Their roots are indeed inextricable. But, we really should have no difficulty in categorizing many large scale activities as belonging to

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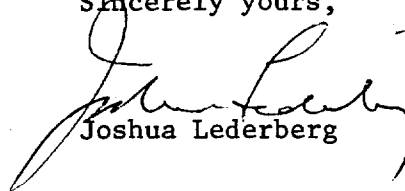
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technology, or action, rather than science, or knowledge. And, while I have no difficulty in seeing the development of social policy to civilized technology, the side effects of efforts to control science would soon run athwart many of our liberal and humanistic values. I don't see in your diagram even the exhibition, much less any evidence, of a priority of technology over science. Do you mean that primitive technology was closer to the reality principle, prior to the development of experimental methodology, than was primitive science? Primitive man made tools, used fire, planted grains, while adhering to animistic theories of nature which we now reject as bad science. But, his technology was often faulty at least as judged by the overt purposes of rain-making or warding off contagion. So, if you really mean priority, I will have to ask you for some further explanation. About the synthesis, I have no quarrel.

I don't feel quite as futile as you do in attempting technology assessment. I think that the problems are much larger than the authors of the Office of Technology Assessment Act and the worst sin may be to cloak common sense policy judgements with unwonted scientific rigor.

One of these days, I will attempt a more coherent statement of the ideas that were sketched out in the S.C.L.R. article and I appreciate your bringing home to me, whether you intended it or not, the importance of saying just what such an article does and does not attempt to cover. If the utopias of every citizen must coincide, indeed we might as well not waste our time on technology assessment. If axiological ethics means an effort to construct a system of argument from autonomous axioms, without having to define just what these are, perhaps this is really what I am groping for.

Sincerely yours,



Joshua Lederberg

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